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Organic AND local?

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Organic AND local? Caseinsights from a two-in-one approach to regional public food sourcing for the public in the city of Aalborg

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Abstract

Through its procurement the public has the power influence local food economies in a more sustainable way and as a result public food has increasingly become politicized over the past decades. In some countries strategists has traditionally set ambitions on increasing the share of organics in public procurement as a mean to contribute to more sustainable foods systems. But the politicisation has also lead to a call for more locally sourced food. This paper examines the case of procurement in the city of Aalborg and builds on in depth interviews with representatives from both demand and supply side. It concludes by pointing to a number of factors that are enabling and supporting both organic and short chain priorities in this sector. It finally lists a number of disabling factors that seems to hinder the development.

Introduction

Place based strategies to procurement of food for the public plate is spreading. At the same time procurement of food is increasingly expected to align with organic food and farming strategies (Brammer & Walker 2011; Lehtinen, 2012; Smith et al. 2014). As an important part of public welfare systems in the Nordic countries public plate food has long been the object of public policymaking. In Denmark ambitious national goals has been set for the organic share of such food procurement in order to establish public sector food as a stable market for organic growers (Mikkelsen & Lundø 2016). Although many regions and municipalities - the owners of public kitchens - has translated these goals to organic procurement contracts, many wants to move further towards a more place-based approach and integrate procurement policies into the local food economy. Through its procurement the public has the power influence local food economies in a sustainable way. However to reengineer supply chains and at the same time comply with procurement rules is a complex task. The aim of this paper examine the findings from the Aalborg public foodscape program in which objectives of both organics and local sourcing are pursued at the same time. Conceptually we build on the idea of foodscapes and place making. Foodscape studies (Mikkelsen, 2011) represent a new direction of research in which food consumption is seen in a spatial way where as place making (Berry, 2010) refers to the idea that special and value adding narratives can be create around foods with a particular provenance and rootedness in the place – for instance a city.

Whereas the rule for organics is governed by Council Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007 the rules for short chain procurement in the local and regional are is governed by the EU procurement directive, While previously rather inflexible and conservative when it comes to cater for short chain

procurement strategies the recently revised version (2014/24/EU) gives directions for how to handle such demands. These include encouraging contracting authorities to divide contracts into lots, making tenders more accessible to SME’s, limiting the turnover required to participate in a tender procedure allowing more SMEs and start-ups to participate and decreasing the documentation requirements for procurement procedures.

Methods

Informant representing abroad spectrum form both supply and demand side related to public food procurement in and around the city of Aalborg was recruited for individual interviews. The sampling of informants was structured so that the geographical delimitation was suppliers and food service procurement officials situated in one of the 11 municipalities in the Region of Nordjylland. Since public food is anchored at more governmental levels depending on the type of foodservice the sampling was aimed at covering all 3 governmental levels - municipality, region and state since they are all operating public food services. The types of foodservice covered included hospitals, nursing homes, meals-on-wheels facilities and army service canteen facilities. The three levels are shown in table 1. To uncover the views of the professional consumers, their procurement advisors and suppliers a structured interview guide for face to face semi-structured interviews at the demand side was developed in order to assess the pros and cons of a coordinated multi level public procurement with both organic and short supply chain objectives. In addition to interviews document analysis of recent policy documents were carried out.

| Government level | Types of catering | Features |
|------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| State | Defense, university, prisons | Large scale, outsourced, contracts |
| Region | Hospital, institutions | Large scale, in house |
| Municipality | Schools. Kindergarten | Smaller units, few contracts, non-standardised |
| Municipality | Nursing homes, meals-on-wheels | Large scale, in house & outsourced |

Table 1. The table shows the three types of public food service and their corresponding level of government included in the case study.

Results

The study shows that there is a growing interest in developing the public plate to meet objectives of being both organic and based on shorter supply chains. Stakeholders agree overall on the principle of putting more emphasis on developing the local food economy to play a more distinct role as

suppliers for the different types of public foodservice in and around the city. The study clearly shows that place based food strategies have had an impact on the way of thinking about the provenance of food including that of public food. According to the study it also clear that procurement of food for public kitchens has become an important object of policymaking. However moving from simple procurement strategies to more multi purpose complex strategies for the benefit of the local food economy is far from simple. The results shows that there are a number enabling factors in place.

- **A new preparedness for pre competitive partnership working.** Shortening of supply changes in public procurement cannot take place only by posting a new call for tender. Instead such innovation as a result of long term pre-competitive processes in which demand and supply side exchange views and create relations.
- **Public plate innovation a potential key to workforce development.** The outline of a revival for public plate food and its importance seems to have been creating a new capacity building in the public food professions New sustainable food procurement practices in many cases makes it necessary to change menus and preparations of meals. New recipe composition requires new knowledge, skills and competencies among the food workers and therefore is workforce development an important part of short supply chain policies.
- **Politicization of the public plate services opens new avenues.** Public food has traditionally been regarded as a mundane routine task that can be made subject to routinization. Therefore, making public food subject to policy change and lifting the issue up at a strategic level is not done overnight but requires persistent effort.
- **Gastronomification of public food links to the urban food strategy movement.** The place based food strategy food movement seems to have been fueling a new type of food urbanism identity in which the assets of a place and a city has come to play a much more important role in the creation of identities around cities that has also influence the welfare gastronomy sector.

The study in addition points to a number of disabling factors that seems to hinder the implementation of shorter chain procurement strategies in food service

- **Outsourcing adds an extra governance layer.** Modern food service is not only face33 with calls for quality and sustainability. Also public spending is an issue that has a strong influence on innovation in procurement practices. Public food services are in many cases is outsourced to 3rd parties which add an extra organizational interface.
- **Multi level public food governance requires intersectoriality.** In Denmark like in many countries public food is the responsibility of more levels of government. For instance the governments at municipal, the regional and the national level. Coordinating these different levels is challenging and requires new procedures of cooperation between civil servants and practitioners.
- **The art of public procurement tends to be a constraint in itself.** Public procurement include a long range of professional practices such as constructing tenders, checking compliance, negotiations between parties, defining quality requirement in the food service

kitchens, maintaining communication between producers and suppliers. In addition it includes legal procedures regulated by laws and regulation. These bureaucratic procedures are pointed to as being counterproductive to following the overall ambitions of sustainability local food policies.

- **Logistic requirements are challenging for small producers.** Public food service operates after detailed plans and cycles that requires a well planned logistic structure in the supply chain. In some cases there are few options for the smaller business to transport the produce into the larger procurement system and in some cases volumes can be difficult to meet. In some cases the solution seems to be for the local producers to work together on meeting the demands of the public.

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